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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 005270

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [IS](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: KING ABDULLAH VISITS TURKEY, SHARES CONCERNS ABOUT
IRAQ CONSTITUTIONAL PROCESS

REF: AMMAN 7157

Classified By: POLCOUNS Janice G. Weiner for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

Summary

1. (C) Jordan's King Abdullah visited Ankara September 5 at his initiative and met briefly with Turkish President Sezer, PM Erdogan and Foreign Minister Gul. Focusing on Iraq, Abdullah reportedly expressed two major concerns: first, that Iraq's Sunnis are becoming alienated from the constitutional process, which they view as overemphasizing sectarian interests over Iraqi unity, and second, that if Shias and Kurds feel they can go their separate ways, Iran's influence in Iraq would only be strengthened. Abdullah and the Turks agreed to more intense Jordan-Turkey consultations to find ways to ensure all Iraq's groups are kept in the process, Iraqi national unity is promoted over sectarian interests, and Iran's influence is not allowed to grow. Abdullah said he would also discuss these concerns with President Bush (NFI). Discussions also touched upon the Middle East Peace Process, with both sides agreeing Israel's pullout from Gaza represented a major opportunity that should not be squandered. End Summary

Jordanian Concerns about Sunni Participation in Iraq

2. (C) King Abdullah spent a few hours in Ankara September 5 consulting with President Sezer and PM Erdogan on Iraq, the Middle East Peace Process, and bilateral issues. MFA sources tell us the visit was hastily arranged at Abdullah's request and Iraq was foremost on his mind. MFA DG for Middle East Celikkol told PolMilCouns September 7 Abdullah was worried about growing Iranian influence on Iraqi politics. The King asked for increased Jordan-Turkey consultation and cooperation, including the exchange of "information and notes" on Iraq, and the Turks agreed. According to Celikkol, the King asserted he had some influence with Shia groups not under Tehran's control as well as some moderate Sunni groups. Celikkol said the King believes the constitution will be approved in the referendum; he is more concerned about the outcome of the December general elections. Asked what other Arab governments were doing to address his concern, Abdullah asserted the North Africans were distant and disinterested while other Arab leaders were fearful of engaging more fully for fear of attacks on their diplomatic personnel and out of concern for their own, potentially restive Shia populations (save Egypt).

3. (C) Expanding on Celikkol's report, MFA Middle East Department Head Sedat Onal told Poloffs September 8 that Abdullah reiterated long-standing concern that Iraq's Sunnis are being alienated from the political process, especially the development of the constitution. According to Abdullah, the Sunnis are increasingly convinced the constitution as drafted does not serve their needs, emphasizing the interests of different ethnic and religious groups at the expense of a broad Iraqi identity. Abdullah worried that if the Shias and Kurds feel emboldened to go their own separate ways in Iraq, Iranian influence on Iraqi politics will only grow. If the Shia gain wider influence in Iraq than justified by their proportion of the population, the "Shia Crescent" in the region will be strengthened. In this context, Shia rumblings about an autonomous region are troubling. Abdullah reportedly called for greater cooperation to ensure all Iraqi groups remain involved in the political process and that a broad Iraqi identity is protected and encouraged over sectarian interests. According to Onal, President Sezer agreed with the King's assessment and noted that there is still time for the Sunnis to increase their participation, particularly in forming the legislation that will fill out the constitutional framework. PM Erdogan reportedly agreed more emphasis must be placed on a unified Iraqi identity but the actions of the Shias as well as the Kurds are a disturbing sign that communal tendencies continue to dominate.

MEPP -- Not Losing an Opportunity

4. (C) According to the MFA, the King and his hosts touched on the MEPP, with the Turks reportedly hoping that Arab public opinion would support PA President Mahmoud Abbas and give the peace process a chance in the wake of Israel's pull-out from Gaza settlements. Palestinians should be

particularly careful to ensure security at this juncture. Abdullah reportedly agreed the pull-out represented a great opportunity that should not be lost. Our MFA interlocutors said specifics were not discussed. Jordanian Embassy officials told Poloff September 8 that Abdullah stressed to his hosts the pull-outs must be considered a step in the process and all further steps must be closely tied to the roadmap.

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